

---

HIS ENEMY.

DR. ST. JOHN was traveling down to Hartsdale by the express. A man of world-wide mark, he had also a local following, and wherever he might go, within a day's journey from home, some one was sure to name him as "St. John, the oculist." A stranger, even, might have guessed at his profession from the keen glance, the considered movements, of a man used to meeting emergencies. The doctor's face wore a veil of reserve: friendly to the present, it indicated a guarded past; and the iron-gray hair, the sunken temples, showed, with some likelihood of exactness, how remote a past it had been. On that journey memory gripped him hard. He was retracing twenty-odd years, and wondering how, in all that time, he could have been so sure God would deliver his enemy into his hand. He put it so, not from any belief in God's immediate justice, but because a formulated saying was easily remembered, and stood by him when he scorned to recall the poor old drama which had at once impoverished and enriched him.

In that past, so far removed now that childhood seemed the nearer, he was a young man with a good deal of money, some knowledge of medicine, and a beautiful wife. Now, with his perceptions quickened under the lash, he realized how dull he must have been in those old days; not so much with the facile dullness of youth, articulate because it

has so little to say, but from that inertia born of prosperity and a belief in the permanence of tangible things. His practice lay among a class whose forbears had hobnobbed with his. He had a serious house full of ancestral gods, on the sacredness of which he most devoutly reckoned; and he had, to hold until Judgment Day, the beautiful wife. Then the other man appeared, the man who delighted in a changing universe, and preached the irony of fixed beliefs; and he, while St. John considered lenses in the office, made romantic love to the wife in the parlor. St. John never knew how it began. If he had known, it would have seemed to him far less dignified than he allowed himself to call it, even when he reflected that his wife had a great-grandmother of unknown extraction, though indisputably French. It was at first only a foolish little game, born of a man's greed and a woman's vanity, full of roses, echoing regrets, sighs over coming absence, and deification of chivalry and beauty. The woman was a flower plucked too soon; the man a martyr denied the wearing of her. These were theories easily engendered in a wife who had been wooed too coldly, and a free lance frankly amorous, and lately become an epicure at the feast. Whether the two would have sought each other, had they found no barriers, will not be known; but the frowning

wall of her vow and his dishonor piqued and tempted them. At last they were in love; and, with the enormous egotism of that state, they flaunted their banners and cried out to the world, "Make way!" St. John was slow in discovering the invasion of his home. His wife was cold to him, — that, at least, he knew; and when, in a moment of hysteria, she told him how she stood upon the ruins of what her life might have been, he suffered that pang of sexual jealousy which is perhaps a man's most terrible inheritance from the fighting male. For him, however, the horror of the situation was only equalled by its simplicity. He walked away from her without dwelling, even in fancy, upon the crass revenges of an earlier age, and as soon as the law would let him presented her with the legal document he thought she craved. She was free. Then he settled half his property upon her, and she and Ferguson, pushed into each other's arms, married and went away, rather dazed, with the wages of indiscretion in their pockets. He had not seen them since, and he had never ceased to believe that God would deliver Ferguson into his hands. He felt quite easy in expecting it, because, it seemed to him, he did it quite impersonally, as an on-looker who has paid dearly for a place at the game.

People were amazed when he gave his wife her freedom and her fee in that simple fashion. At first they laughed; then they called it quixotism, and because he kept a steady front they gave up talking about it. But actually no one in the round world dreamed how he bled at the heart, not more from losing the woman than the wounding of an armored pride and the consciousness that his respectable life was wrapped about in bathos. He had inherited unsmirched traditions, and a woman had turned them into a lampoon. The lampoon would never be forgotten. So, in his defeated state, he carried himself invulnerably, and bent his wits to the

practice of medicine. That ill-used mind of his — befogged by the dictum that the St. Johns are a chosen people, bound to intermarry with other chosen people and breed decorum — arose to shine. Necessity had touched him on the shoulder. At first he looked around scornfully, to say, What fellow is this? But the messenger did not quail; and he began to realize that the world is made up of men and women, — not St. Johns and others. After his intellect had expanded to take in that idea, it took in a few more, and his colleagues, wondering, said that St. John was not such a fool, after all. A few years later they hailed him with acclaim. He had given them something; he was the equal of other men who had given. At last he might enter that splendid republic where crowns are won only by desert; and at last, they knew, he loved the equality he had learned to understand. For the first time in a thousand years of arrogance St. John was a great name, and the man who had made it so wore it with humility.

To-day the doctor's heart beat hard with a personal excitement it was seldom called upon to register. In spite of himself, he seemed to be reaching forth to a triumph from which, at the same time, he shrank. It was a tawdry situation, and yet quite inevitable. He hated it; but he would no more have refused it than any other step in the appointed way. For, through long comparison of deeds and their results, he believed in the constraining power of one act upon another. The germ of this afternoon's event had been planted in his youth. He could not refuse the harvesting.

Taking out the letter, he held it secure from cursory eyes behind him, and read it over. There was not a word in it to be concealed, yet the phrases flamed in fire. It was from Ferguson, begging him to come down and see Mildred. She was alarmingly nervous, and, doubt-

less for that reason, imagined that something was the matter with her eyes. It was one of her whims that nobody but Dr. St. John could give her a trustworthy verdict, and Ferguson had no resource save to convey her wishes. The letter was sincerely worded, yet, even at his first reading, St. John caught himself threading into it a tone of inevitable shame. He had responded with complete simplicity, believing that, in some way, this was God's method of handing over his fettered foe.

The day was warm with the grace of Indian summer. A haze dwelt upon the distance, mysteriously purpling above the russet of the fields. For the last two months St. John had been working in the city; and looking to find the year where he left it, he saw how it had fled away into this soft magnificence of change. His eyes grew wistful over the transmuting of remembered beauty, where uplands, warm in ripened grasses, swelled beside the track, and fences marked a line of seething underbrush. He felt suddenly alive to every atom of the rolling earth. Some keener sentience had responded to the turmoil of the little world within his brain.

The express drew into the station, where Ferguson himself sat waiting in a speckless trap. St. John knew him at once, in spite of the betraying years. He did not think of the change in himself, as he walked across the platform, bag in hand, with the alert step of one whose arrival bears a meaning. He was the only passenger to alight, and Ferguson knew him: that was the only reason. He nodded, and offered a hand which St. John, setting his bag in the trap, did not see.

"Thought I'd drive you over myself," said Ferguson, as the doctor took the place beside him. "It's rather necessary — see you beforehand, you know. You've got to be prepared."

St. John nodded, not looking at him again, but really almost overthrown by

the keenness of his wonder. For fate was being fulfilled. The man had worked out his destiny. Disease had stricken him, and left her cruel marks. Ferguson was heavy; his broad shoulders, once so alluring to the feminine fancy, were shrugged forward under excess of brawn, and his head crouched close between them. But it was the face where, to the practiced eye, Tragedy had taken up her dwelling. The unwholesome flesh, the baggy outline, the tattling color, — St. John shrank under the implication, as if a curse had fallen there, and he had wrought it. Ferguson pulled the horses into a walk, and, watching them keenly, tried to tell his story.

"It's damned good of you to come!" he burst out, turning for an instant toward St. John.

"We always answer professional calls," said the doctor, unreasonably irritated that, having meant to speak neutrally, he only managed a cold constraint.

"Yes, I know, but — However, here's the whole thing in a nutshell. She's been breaking down, one way or another, for a number of years. I saw it, — God! I guess I did! Everybody saw it, — but there didn't seem to be anything to do, except stand from under. Tantrums, you know, that sort of thing. I've been a brute; that is, I suppose so. I used to think she could help it; so I gave her what-for. But that was when she was 'round on her feet. Now she lies and shudders, and says she's going to be blind; and, good Lord! a man can't stand that, you know. I'd cut off my right hand."

Involuntarily the doctor glanced at the strong hand in its driving glove, and read honesty in the husky tone, though it was not yet apparent whether Ferguson would make that sacrifice to benefit the woman or to save himself her complaints.

"Have her eyes been examined?" he asked curtly.

"No; she would n't consent to it unless I'd send for you. Said she could n't bear to hear it from anybody else. The fact is, I don't believe there's anything the matter. It's her general health. She's had a hundred imaginary diseases since she broke down. Now it's her eyes. Isn't that possible?"

"Quite possible."

"It's all hysteria, I tell her," said Ferguson, letting the horses go, and, quite unconsciously to himself, brightening into pleasure over their action. "Bad enough, but still it does n't kill, now does it?"

"No, it does n't kill," said the doctor; and the two men watched the horses in silence until, driving up a long avenue, they stopped before a colonial house, and a man ran out to meet them. Ferguson became warmly hospitable. He made as if to take the doctor's bag; but St. John, with a little dissenting gesture, laid hands on it himself, and followed him up the steps. In the great hall he took off his overcoat, with the stiffness of one who is breathing an alien air, and then accompanied his host upstairs. He felt as if he should pay exorbitantly for the interview. Still, he told himself rigidly, he could not refuse it. Midway of the flight Ferguson paused.

"Won't you have something before you go in?" he asked. "Glass of wine? brandy?"

"No, thanks."

"Well, dinner 'll be on the table presently."

They stopped before a closed door, and Ferguson knocked, saying, at the same instant, in a whisper, "You go in alone."

"No!" responded St. John sharply. It was a tone quite familiar to his assistant and some of the nurses. His face changed swiftly to a tense command. He had entered his own ground, where he was accustomed to be obeyed. "I may need you," he added. "You will stay."

"All right," complied Ferguson, shrugging his shoulders with the air of one who is never permitted to escape.

Meantime a woman's voice had called twice, "Come in!" and Ferguson opened the door.

"Here he is, Milly," he said; and St. John, advancing with composure, went up to her couch. He had forbidden himself to look at her with the eyes of the heart or memory.

She was lying there, a graceful length, all white lace and light blue ribbons. She rose on one elbow, and a sleeve, in falling, showed the wasting of her arm. She was in the pathetic stage of a woman who has been beautiful, and still retains the charm which is more than beauty. Her black hair had only a thread or two of gray; her black lashes were long and beguiling, but the blue eyes they shaded held an alien look. That was fear. St. John, with a quick professional air, took the seat in readiness at her elbow. For all his manner told, he might never have seen her until this moment. She put out her hand in an impulsive way, and he, accepting it, laid it gently on the couch.

"Now for the eyes," he said, in a tone of perfunctory cheerfulness. "What seems to be the matter with them?"

They were dwelling on his face.

"How you have changed!" she murmured, her voice touching upon awe.

Ferguson turned quickly on his heel, and, in spite of himself, St. John felt a hot flush mount wretchedly to his brow.

"Just draw up that shade," he said peremptorily to the other man. "Help me fix these pillows. Stay by, please. I shall want you."

Then, insisting upon trivial services not in the least needful, he proceeded to an examination. By the time it was three quarters over she had begun to talk, uncontrollably, like one who finds relief in words.

"It is true, is n't it?" she kept repeating. "Just what I knew before."

I'm going to be blind. But don't tell me to-day. I could n't bear it yet. I suppose you've told hundreds of people the same thing. It does n't mean anything to you. Shall you want me to have an operation? I could n't bear it! I could n't bear it!"

This was her cry, — the cry of fear. She could not bear it, whatever it was to be. Meantime, his large white hands, almost divine in their trained gentleness, were upon either side her head, as he placed it on the pillow. He knew there was some virtue either in his touch or in the acquiescent minds of patients, for he could always soothe them. And then, unprepared for speech, he opened his lips and said lightly, surprising himself as much as he did her, —

"Well, I don't think you need to be afraid of blindness just yet."

"There!" cried Ferguson. "By Jove! what did I tell you? Last week it was pneumonia, and the week before, your head buzzed. By George! I wish there was a pill for hysteria!" But his tone was kindly and full of relief. St. John guessed that the little eyes, half hidden within their fleshy caverns, were wet with tears.

Mildred was looking at the doctor.

"How can you tell me so?" she asked calmly. "How can you?"

He returned her gaze.

"I don't say you have n't more or less trouble with your eyes," he continued, "but my theory would be that you must build up your general health."

"Just what I said," interposed Ferguson. "The general health!"

"Who is your family doctor?"

"I hate him," she remarked indifferently.

"Has n't seen him for three years," put in Ferguson. "Just lies here and thinks up diseases, and won't let me call anybody in."

"I should suggest your taking to yourself a doctor," advised St. John gravely. "You need to lie in bed awhile; milk,

eggs, massage, trained nurse, — that sort of thing. Then, after a time, have your eyes looked at again. I could send somebody down, if I could n't come myself." He had privately resolved not to come himself. The test was overpowering him. "Now," he concluded, rising, "if I were you, I'd take a little bromide or something, — got any bromide in the house? — and try to go to sleep. You are going through a strain. Give up to it. Rest."

She reached forward and caught his hand, clinging to it with both hers, drawing it toward her until he thought she meant to touch it with her lips.

"No! no!" she sobbed. "Don't go. I am so afraid when I am alone. If you go, I shall be alone."

Ferguson drew nearer, not excited by the appeal, as the other man could see, but only wistfully sorry. St. John sat down again, holding her hand.

"You are not to be alone," he said, compelling her attention. "You are not to be alone at all. And you are not to be afraid. There is nothing to be afraid of."

She lay still, her forehead contracted into delicate lines, her lips pitiful. Her lids were down, but the tears trickled underneath them. St. John sat silent until she breathed more calmly, and then took out his tablet and wrote a prescription.

"You'd better send down to the village for this," he said. "It's very simple. Now, remember, you're not going to be afraid or alone. We will take care of you." He touched her hand softly, and her fingers clung.

"When will you come again?" she asked feverishly. And, in spite of himself, he answered, —

"When you need me."

Then he got out of the room, Ferguson behind him. When they were outside the door, he said peremptorily: —

"Send somebody in to her. Who is there here?"

"Her maid."

"Sensible woman?"

"Yes."

"Very well, send her. Have this put up, and give it to her."

Ferguson summoned the woman, and, from the hall below, dispatched a boy for the medicine. Then he drew a long breath, and wiped his forehead.

"By George!" he breathed, "that's a good job well over. The fact is, she was so keen on it I half believed she was right. Her eyes, you know, — something the matter with them."

They turned into the library, and St. John sank into a chair.

"There is," he said hopelessly.

Ferguson sat down opposite, and looked at him.

"It takes it out of you," he remarked untactfully, but with a kindness St. John could not resent. "You're as white as a ghost. Wait a jiff. There's a decanter across the way."

St. John stopped him with a gesture.

"I don't want anything," he said. "As to her eyes, she is right."

Ferguson was staring at him. His own eyes were almost bulging. With his bulk and terror, he looked, St. John saw with an idle interest, almost froggy.

"Right?" repeated Ferguson. "Then there is something serious?"

"Yes."

"You don't mean she's going to be blind?"

"Inevitably."

"You thought it best to deceive her?"

"I don't know."

Ferguson looked at him as if he wondered what key would unlock him.

"You don't know?" he repeated.

"No; I had no intention in speaking. I simply didn't tell her."

There was a dark silence, and Ferguson said to himself, "Well, I shan't tell her."

"No," St. John acquiesced.

They fell into a maze of thought, and

seemed to forget each other. The moment was broken by a soft-voiced maid, coming in to announce that dinner was served. Ferguson rose with a start, and St. John rose also, saying: —

"Where did I leave my coat? I must be getting on."

"Of course, after dinner; though I'd like you to stay the night. I believe they're ready for us in the dining room."

"Thank you," said St. John, now in the hall, struggling into his coat. "But I lunched late, and I'm rather depending on the walk. I want a breath of country air."

Ferguson looked worried and defeated.

"Oh, come, now!" he urged; "have a bite of something, and I'll drive you the twelve miles to the flag station. You can take the train there. You'll find lashings of country air."

But St. John was on the outer step now, bag in hand, looking his determination. The moist cold of the twilight struck upon his face, and recalled him to professional demands.

"She should see a doctor," he said. "Hamerton's a good general practitioner. As I remember, he's only a mile or so from here. Put her into his hands. But first send him up to consult with me." He turned away, and then, with the uncontrollable impulse of a non-impulsive nature, turned back. "Pardon me for saying that you should see a doctor yourself," he added. "Borrowdale, for example."

Ferguson started, as if the words had stung him. His face grew livid.

"Good God!" he sibilated. "Can you see through stone walls? How do you know what's the matter with me?"

The doctor was drawing his gloves through his chilling hands.

"I should see Borrowdale," he repeated, and walked away down the steps.

Ferguson was beside him; he was

trembling, and his voice, too, shook pathetically.

"For God's sake," he was entreating, "don't leave a man like this! How did you know I'd seen Borrowdale?"

"I did n't. I recommended your doing it."

"Well, Hamerton recommended it, too. I went last week."

"So!" said St. John, with an unhappy attempt at lightness. "Then you have n't got to do it again."

Ferguson stopped short, with so compelling an air that St. John stopped, also, and looked at him. The man was gazing off into the west, where windy clouds were parted by a line of light.

"No, I have n't got it to do again," he said savagely. "I've paid my scot. I've been told to live moderately, cultivate a cheerful mind, keep a medicine bottle at my elbow and some little pills in my pocket. Want to see 'em? There they are." He took out a small paste-board box, and glanced at it with a curious distaste. "I did n't know I had any imagination," he continued, drawing the words, with difficulty, from some fund of hateful experience, "but that box has given me D. T. I'd rather see snakes under the bed. I'm afraid of it, but I don't dare to stop carrying it 'round, and I don't dare to stop taking the pills." He looked full at his listener, with the stare of one summoning a familiar horror. St. John could see that he was under the spell of a breaking mortality. This is the moment when the soul is beckoned from a body still robust. It has not reached the stage when gravity is overcome, and it rises from the earth of its own lightness. St. John, like all doctors, had read the moods of those who are to be reft away. He knew how terrible the pang may be in anticipation; how simple and natural it is when it really comes.

"This is the first stage," he said, hardly knowing how he spoke. "You won't mind it later."

"Not mind it! Great God!" breathed Ferguson. "Give up all this, and not mind it!" He looked about at the trees, and then beyond to the horizon and the upper sky, as if he owned them all.

"Have you told — any one?" St. John hesitated.

"Mildred? No. That's the devil of it. What am I going to leave her to?" Again the tears came into his eyes, and the doctor, hardly knowing he did so, put out his hand to his enemy; and so they parted.

St. John walked to the station with a determined haste. His blood flowed quickly. He was conscious of that deep excitement which rises inevitably as a tide obedient to spiritual issues; but action had ceased to express even the index of what he felt. Blinding possibilities stared him in the face. He could not as yet guess at their outcome; he could only quiver under their terrible concrete potency.

The next day, when time had served him as time will, and enabled him to settle into a habit of thought, it was not quite the same. Yet he could only see himself in the midst of a moral puzzle. His enemy and his enemy's wife were not to be formulated. Hitherto, they had seemed to him two creatures set in the universe in relation to himself alone. He smiled with an awestricken amusement born of the discovery that he had overrated the forces of this vastness called life. He had regarded it from the one centre made by himself, only to find that this was no centre at all, but only another fluent atom. For many years Ferguson and Mildred had borne the part of sinners whom he was presently, by some righteous necessity, to judge. Now they insisted on appearing as well-defined individuals, who belonged neither to him nor, perhaps, to each other. Each seemed to be clinging to some uncertain spar, quite isolated, quite out of relation to anything human,

— accompanied only by that mystery whence being springs. More than that, the professional conscience, rising up in him, bade him remember that there was something practical to be done, and bound him, by all forms of honor, to do it.

In a few days Dr. Hamerton came up to consult with him, and they agreed that, in the woman's present state, nothing should be said to disturb her. The blow must fall, but time itself might soften it. Then followed daily bulletins, irksome to St. John in welding a tie he left unrecognized, and at the same time assuaging the anxiety he had to feel. For a time Hamerton said she was better, and, as he boldly assumed, from having seen St. John and receiving from him some impulse of cure. But now she was falling into uncontrolled hysteria; and he felt with her that she needed to see the oculist again. At least it was an experiment to be made. So the other man went down, and got off at the little station where bare tree trunks were blackened under melting frost. This time Ferguson did not meet him. He was keeping his room a good deal, the coachman said.

At the house a nurse stood visibly in waiting, and her look hurried St. John up the stairs. Mildred lay on her couch, a handkerchief across her eyes.

"You have come!" she cried, in shrill welcome. "I thank God! I thank God!"

He sat down by her, and took her wrist in a reassuring grasp. She drew a long breath, as if, in that, she relinquished all the responsibilities of life.

"They are worse, you see," she whispered. "I have to keep them covered now. They feel safer in the dark. But sometimes I scream and tear the bandage off, for fear the dark is real."

"And it never is," he returned quietly. "You have n't any right to dread things until I tell you to. You must meet it calmly."

"Meet it! Meet what?"

"Whatever comes. Life. The whole business."

"But I am afraid of meeting it alone."

This interchange seemed quite simple, as things do in extreme emotion, and it never occurred to him to wonder whether she had ceased counting Ferguson in at all. Like a priest, he recognized the power of his office. To her he was the doctor, potent, if not to save, to establish, by virtue of inherited usage, some commerce between life and death.

"You shall not be alone," he said calmly.

"Do you promise that?"

"Yes, I promise."

She sighed, this time with glad abandonment; and, lifting the bandage, he held his beneficent hands at her temples, to shield her from the light. A smile dawned on her face.

"How kind you look!" she whispered. "How kind you are!"

Yet this apparently had nothing to do with the man he had been twenty years before, or the woman who betrayed him. It was all strangely impersonal. He went through a perfunctory examination, and then, calling in the nurse, made much of certain harmless measures calculated to impress the patient's mind. When he had finished his visit Mildred was quite composed, though a little flush had risen in her cheeks, and she showed some of the eagerness of renewing life.

"Will you come whenever I send?" she asked him.

"I will try," he answered gravely.

"I am very busy."

"But if I send because I can't bear it another instant, then you'll come?"

"Yes, I'll come."

There was no vestige of her former coquetry. He remembered her, with a sting of hurt pride, as a woman who, in her most unconsidered moods, had waved, though always delicately, the challenge of her sex. She was provocative of



flattery, an exaggerated devotion, all the fleeting bloom of life. Now she regarded her prerogative no more than if she had been a shipwrecked creature clinging to a plank. Salt seas had washed the Lilith out of her. He left her still smiling, and in the hall was told that Mr. Ferguson wanted him. There, in an upper room, he found him sitting, his feet stretched on a chair. He had changed with the later stages of an unyielding malady.

"I tell you what it is, St. John," he began, with no civil preamble; "this won't do. It's too much for me. Sometimes I think I'll blow my brains out for good and all."

"Oh no!" said St. John, taking a chair near him. "You can't do that, you know."

• "Why can't I?"

"I don't precisely know the reason, but you can't."

At that moment St. John failed to summon moral arguments of any color. He passed a weary hand over his forehead, and reflected, with a certain irritation, upon the inadequacy of creeds. "Besides, the shot would be heard downstairs."

"I know," said Ferguson, as if that established a soul-satisfying reason. "I moved up here to be out of her way. I go down half a dozen times in the forenoon or afternoon. She thinks I'm out the rest of the time, — driving, what-not, — and I spend the evening with her. But it's got to end. Who's going to tell her?"

"We seem to have refrained from telling most things, so far," said St. John miserably.

"There's money enough," continued Ferguson, as if he meditated aloud. "She's all tight and snug, so far as that's concerned." And, ironical as it might have seemed, neither of them considered whose money it had been that made the safety.

St. John got away without being, as

he fancied, of any practical use; and he lived for weeks thereafter in expectance of the crisis which inevitably came. The news of it was sent him at once by the attending physician. Ferguson had taken to his bed for good, and nobody had been willing to tell his wife the reason. St. John accepted the summons, and went down; but before he reached her she had guessed, and met him in the hall, strained with apprehension.

"He is very sick," she said rapidly. "I'm afraid he's been sick for a long time."

"Yes." St. John was regarding her with that loving-kindness wrought in him by the study of human needs. "He concealed it to spare you. Now you must spare him."

Her face fell into lines of unmistakable horror; he could not tell whether it was that of grief, or distaste for a distasteful situation.

"I ought not to have neglected him!" she whispered.

"You need n't neglect him any more."

"But what can I do?"

"Be steady. Be patient. You know what it is to be afraid. Help him not to be."

"Will you stand by me?"

"Yes."

Then it became evident to St. John that Ferguson had got his second wind. He had fallen into that acquiescence which belongs to the last victory of the soul, and was showing a stubborn courage more to be desired than the gallantry of assault. Some unexpected joy seemed to fall into his cup through the strength of the woman who ministered to him. His eyes followed her. She did not flag.

"Good old girl!" he whispered more than once. "I did n't think she had it in her."

The disease fulfilled every condition of prophecy, and hardly seemed to interest the sick man in any degree, now that he had once looked into that dark-

ening vista at the end. St. John's frequent visits gave him some counterfeit of pleasure, though they talked of nothing more significant than the level of stocks or paces of a horse. So far as words went, St. John found him a very good fellow; and, however much he avoided retrospect, he began to see more and more clearly how Mildred had been moved and carried by that assertive strength. It stood for a great deal, little as it might fulfill, — earthly delight, action, joy. Coupled with youth, Ferguson's equipment might well have proved irresistible. Once St. John would have drawn from that residuum of Puritanism, which served him for imagination, a certainty that they two could hardly have met thus at the gates of death without a clashing of spiritual weapons, question and answer, accusation and dull reply. From the smitten man there should be remorseful groping toward the forsaken path of honor, hidden by his own sad choice. And the victorious foe? He was meant to stand unmoved, looking on at God's fashion of requital. But this mortal progress proved, in fact, as lacking in sensationalism as if it were a journey to market. Ferguson's rebellion against his sentence had only lasted out the strength given him to rebel; and finally, a man of simple courage to the end, he gave up the ghost and was buried.

That night, St. John found himself in his office staring at the fire, and remembering nothing save that his enemy was dead. The fact, in its completeness, affected him only with helpless incredulity. The flaming chapter had not ended with bugle and drum; it had not ended in bathos. It looked exceedingly like the life we live every day.

For three weeks he heard nothing of Mildred, though Dr. Hamerton reported that she had collapsed into nervous misery; but when he had begun to wonder how he was to meet her growing trouble, she sent for him. This was, in every

lineament, the first winter day. Abundant snow had softened outlines, and re-created a virgin earth. A last flooding sunlight lingered on the fields. St. John shrank from its gay well-being. It seemed too bright a world for those other failing eyes to meet. Nevertheless, he was more tranquil than for many years. Life seemed to him very satisfying, as it does when we have once guessed at the beautiful equilibrium of things, and the only right of the striving atom, — the right to sacrifice.

Mildred was in the library, standing motionless to meet him. Her white dress gleamed in curious contrast with the wanness of her face. Perhaps, absorbed as he was in large issues, he had not expected to see her in widow's weeds; at any rate, the lack of them bore no significance. Her trouble had endowed her with something womanly and new. That haggardness had aged her, but it made her sweet. He could trace in it the immemorial look of grief lent by the Mother of Sorrows to all her daughters after her.

"You must tell me the truth to-day," she said, when they had clasped hands. "I know it now. They are worse. Can anything be done?"

"Sit down," he bade her gently; and she sank into a chair, yet still with her imperfect gaze upon his face.

"Do you want me to keep saying it over and over?" she continued, with a touch of reproach. "Well, I've got the courage. I am going to be blind. Do you deny it?"

"No, Mildred," he answered, using her name for the first time. "No, I do not deny it."

She swayed a little in her chair, and then recovered. She had expected the answer, and yet it shook her. She moistened her dry lips, and pressed her hand upon them.

"How long?" she asked huskily.

"That I cannot say. It will not be sudden. You will have time to accus-

tom" — There he stopped, appalled by the brutality of the phrase.

"I wonder what I am going to do?" she murmured to herself.

His answer sprang, not from considered thought, but with a lifetime's cumulative force. It seemed quite simple to him.

"Will you come and live with me?"

She turned upon him, her face flooded, quickening into youth.

"Why? why?" she asked hurriedly.

There was no reason to give, and he did not invent any. Gallant subterfuges had died, with many other buds unfolding in old days.

"I wish it," he said courteously. "It will be — what I wish."

Her eyes still dwelt upon his face, incredulously, yet with a struggling joy. She bent forward, and thrilled him with a whisper: —

"Is it — do you love me?"

She waited for her answer. In that instant, what thronging memories beset him! Love! He saw it in the roseate apotheosis of youth, announced by chiming bells, crowned with unfading flowers, the minister to bliss. He followed it through stony paths marked by other blood-stained tracks up to the barren peaks of pain. Was it the same creature, after all, rose-lipped or passion-pale, starving with loss or drunken on new wine? Was it the love of one soul accompanying him through all, or was this his response to the individual need, and only a part of the general faithfulness to what demands our faith? He was not silent long enough to bring her to confusion, and yet it seemed to him an age of retrospect. He recalled himself.

"Mildred," he said gently, with a compliance so exquisite as to seem like love itself, "I don't know how to define things. I stopped a good while ago. It is n't possible, when you have much to do with life. But whatever happiness I am capable of would result from your coming to me."

"I cannot believe it," she said slowly to herself. "I never dreamt you were this kind of man."

He might have answered that, had she not laid his former life in ruins, he never would have been this kind of man. But even the thought was far from him. He only waited for her to speak, and then, as she palpably could not, he went on:

"Perhaps conventionalities signify as little to you as they do to me. They are not important to me now, if they stand in the way of something greater. Perhaps you would be willing to come to me as soon as possible. Then, if we were under the same roof, you would feel safe. I fancy you would not be nervous. You would accept things."

"Ah!" she breathed quickly. This was the first gleam of hope in all her darkening lot. But through her gains and losses she had kept some accountability to the world. "It would seem," she began — "people would say" — Then a scarlet shame beset her. She remembered who had betrayed their common life to vulgar tongues.

The doctor took her speech precisely at its face value. That was easy, for he had left himself outside the question. Life had resolved itself into a hurried progress, wherein his only duty was to act. There was no time, between this and death, even to listen for the world's dull verdict.

"It is true," he said. "The memory of the dead must be respected; but extraordinary cases demand like remedies. When you consider that his one thought, through his illness, was to save you pain, you can imagine that your safety would give him more pleasure than anything else."

But she was not thinking of the other man. Her mind had wandered, woman fashion, to the past, piecing it, with unreasoning precision, to the living hour. St. John was beginning here.

"I don't want to urge it unduly," he continued, "but it is only fair to tell you

that you would have a sheltered life, a free one. I should wish to be regarded as your friend, one who would make no demands on you."

She seemed to suffer under a secret sting. Perhaps, without even sketching for herself the outlines of that most thrilling dream, she craved the urgency of love as it is in youth, eager and uncontrolled. Even his kindness left her a woman scorned; but the next words, though spoken awkwardly, disarmed her.

"I should be," he said, "your debtor — always. I need n't say that."

"Robert," she whispered, with sudden passion, "when did you forgive me? You *have* forgiven me? Then — at once — or lately?"

He started up in irrepressible feeling, and stood there gripping the back of a chair until his hands blanched under the pressure.

"We can't say those things," he answered huskily. "We can't go back. We must begin now. Mildred, won't you take it, — what I have to offer you? Won't you come?"

Her face softened into something pathetic, and yet grateful.

"Yes," she said quietly, "I will come."

She held out her hand, and he gave it a little pressure. But instead of putting it to his lips, he drew her gently up from her seat and led her to the window.

"Come," he said, "let us take a look at the eyes."

*Alice Brown.*

---